

My name is Joy Herbst, and I live in Fairfield. I am a mother, and a board certified APRN/nurse practitioner. I wish to do you the service of being brief and direct. Our children have unfairly shouldered the brunt and burden of restrictions and mandates, and parents need to have choice around continued masking.

There is no justification to continue mandating masks on our children, the population least affected by and implicated in the COVID pandemic. Any claim of benefits to children universally wearing masks is far outweighed by the risks therein. There are many reasons why children should not be forced to wear masks, and those who wish to continue to unilaterally mask have every right to choose to.

Connecticut is among the top five widely vaccinated states.

Our COVID cases, and more importantly, our related hospitalizations, and associated deaths are all plummeting.

The most recent Omicron strain of COVID is widely and significantly milder than previous strains.

There are multiple effective treatments that are widely available.

Adults are not required to wear masks in their day-to-day activities, or in social or business settings.

Our school district has just approved a \$10.4 million dollar budget with a \$2.9 million increase in special education needs, as the pandemic has had such a profound impact on the social/emotional and learning needs of many of our students.

The AAP, AACAP, and CHA have [declared a national state of emergency in our children's mental health](#) due to the stressors of the pandemic, and psychiatric referrals, substance abuse, and suicide are at an all time high.

Due to the stringent mitigation efforts of the past two years, my own children have required more special education services: speech therapy, occupational therapy, and a move from public school to private school. They have cried while sharing that they (have learned to) fearfully view themselves as a mortal threat to others, and they have been isolated and ostracized in school after traveling to their grandmother's funeral, because other children AND TEACHERS were afraid that they were ill, despite being in perfect health.

How can you soundly stay the course knowing all of this, and at this point in the pandemic?

It is time for the onus to be shifted to personal preference, choice, and health management. **The emergency is OVER.**

Please stop the mask mandates immediately.

The children can't take it anymore.